

**DOWNTOWN BUILDINGS COMMITTEE**  
**APRIL 21, 2016 – THIRD CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION**      **Revised 4-18-16**

**CHARTER:** *“...recommend next steps to ensure new buildings downtown meet community expectations.”*

Study Session 1: Documentation, Transparency, Process & Procedures, Enforcement

Study Session 2: Height/Bulk/Mass, Pedestrian Experience, Modeling

**Study Session 3: Design review process for commercial and multi-family development.**

**FINDINGS:**

- City has limited internal expertise on commercial and multi-family design.
- PTC has a broad charter, which does not mention architectural or landscape review. Commercial and multi-family design expertise varies depending on commissioners' backgrounds and time in office.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Require an early stage design review for new commercial and multi-family projects and major remodels in the downtown triangle. This design review to be done with outside professionals having specific expertise, paid for by the developer.

**Why?**

- Professional expertise focused on quality design benefits all parties. Closes the gap between expectations and outcomes.
- Shifts the conversation from legislating taste (personal opinions) to ensuring predictability in meeting community design standards (codes and guidelines).
- This is an established part of best practices in most cities.
- Developers and architects expect it. Saves time and money for developers and the city.

**When?**

- Early in the planning cycle, as soon as the applicant has a basic site plan, concept, rough elevations and materials to present. May have several iterations.

**How?**

- Options include a standing committee or consulting body of professionals who are well-versed in Los Altos city character and design goals.
- We recommend a pool of consulting architects and landscape architects, drawing one of each to review projects in an advisory capacity. Recommendations are not binding.
- Consultants, as advisors to city staff, bring specific skills and knowledge to review architecture, landscape and site design in meetings with the developer.

**Fiscal Impact?**

- None. Developer pays for consultants. Potential to save city money by resolving design issues early in the process